

Letter from Mabel Hubbard Bell to Alexander Graham Bell, May 1, 1901, with transcript, with transcript

Letter from Mrs. Alexander Graham Bell to Dr. Alexander Graham Bell. HOTEL ROYAL, Rome. May 1 0 , 1901. My dear Alec:

Your telegram saying that you were troubled about your father, and wanted to take him to Baddeck reached me just before we left Palermo, and I could not very well answer it until this morning, I hope that the delay did not matter. It came Monday evening, we were travelling all Tuesday and I answered it first thing Wednesday morning. I hope that your father is better again, but am so glad that you will take him to Baddeck. I am especially glad that the piazza has been covered in for him, you know I had it done with the money he gave us because I thought it would be a thing which he would himself enjoy. I hope that it will be nice and have plenty of moveable sashes and doors so that you can get all the fresh air that you want. If I had thought of you taking your father to Baddeck I would have tried to get there earlier myself, but somehow I did not. Anyway I don't see how I could have managed it being in Sicily. Since, however, you will be there before I can get there anyway I do not feel in such a hurry. You have been there alone with your father and Mrs. Bell each time before, so that I feel as if you could get along better without than with me. I do want very much to get Daisy to Berlin for a little visit under Mr. White's friendship. I think he will do something for us and I am more anxious than I can say to have Daisy meet some new men. Not to make lovers or get a husband, but to make friends and to broaden her views of what makes a fine man, so 2 that in future union with a man like Mr. Tyler may be impossible. He is very persistent and though Daisy does not want him now, I dread the effect upon her of persistent, insistent wooing. I can't shut my doors to him in Washington, even if I did Elsie's would be open and he will be there all the time as he was winter before last. Now if Daisy met some men in Berlin whom she thoroughly admired, liked and respected, while she might not want to marry any, they might raise her

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requirements so that there would no longer be any change of Mr. Tyler's meeting them. She is in a way so modest that she cannot believe that many men will care for her, and Mr. Tyler's faithfulness after all these months touches her. Gipse and Hennrietta Whitney say that one of these young Sicilians with whom we have been so much lately admires her greatly, but she will not believe it. Of course it is not serious anyhow, but the point is that she will not believe herself attractive unless forced to know it. Those Sicilians (they call themselves Swiss by the way, being from the Italian speaking cantons of Switzerland, but one at least was from Palermo,) were awfully good to us, I hope they really liked my young people as much as they seemed to, otherwise they have the most tremendously high ideas of the requirements of hospitality. If we had consented we should simply have lived with and off them the last few days. They took us sightseeing driving by landau and by automobile, dined us and took us to the opera and went after us at five A. M. to Segesta. They are a nice family together, the mother a pleasant homely woman and the head of the house, her daughter-in-law, Edgardos' wife a handsome young woman about Elsie's age and with something of her, the grandchild a dear little girl of three, the pet of all the house and 3 especially of the two men, the men themselves, young men, neither over thirty, and both devoted to each other, their mother and the young wife. They all come down to see us off and stayed until we were out of sight, which meant something, for our boat took longer to cast loose from her moorings than three ocean liners would have done. And when we reached here we found a telegram of welcome from them. I should think they were enterprising and successful business men, for all that they were also about the greatest dandies I ever saw. Daisy says that Edgardo's shirts and pocket-handkerchief always matched! Nevertheless he could and did walk well up-hill under the sun at Segesta, and twice he got up at half past four A. M. in our service. They own sulphur mines, ice works and are running the Mutual Life. We expect to stay here a few days and then if the letters from you are favorable will go on to Florence and Berlin and thence home. I will find out when the Halifax steamers sail. I don't want to stay longer than June first anyway, and now that I have got Mamma on familiar ground I can of course leave her at any time.

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Did you know that Archimedes was a Sicilian? at least a Sicilian Greek? I did so want to go to Greece. Sicily in the first place was a makeshift, but it seems to me now that I have been to Greece as almost all the famous Greeks I ever heard of, and the Greek places most familiar to me are all in Sicily. Archimedes, your Eureka man lived there, I have read on the spot the dramatic and characteristic account of his death, how he was in charge of the fortress which his inventive and mathematical genius had strengthened and rendered well nigh impregnable when it was betrayed by traitors. The very postern door was pointed out to us, we followed the tortuous and cunningly devised passages that were to have been death traps to the foe, but lead the traitor-guided enemy straight to the place where the greatest man in the world was busy tracing problems on the sandy floor. He, the Roman general, had bidden should be saved alive and treated with all honor, but busy with his problems he resented interruption whereupon the soldiers not recognizing him, slew him. The same spirit was in him and as is in you. Devised by him great arms would be suddenly projected without visible human agency over the walls of Syracuse down among the Roman boats which they would upset and destroy and then be withdrawn within the city. Or, great iron hooks dropping over the walls would scoop up Roman soldiers hoist them on high and then fling them down crushed to death. The King whose crown he weighed years before was Hiero II almost the last and with an exception the best of all the rulers of Syracuse the great Greek city, the greatest city of the known world. And it was another ruler of Syracuse of whom the legend of the Sword of Damocles was told. Wasn't Demosthenes the great orator of Greece who put pebbles in his throat to cure stammering? At any rate he died by the hands of victorious Syracuseans. And Scylla and Charybdis and many another famous name belongs to Sicilian places. The "honey of Hybla" is Sicilian honey, Vulcano Smithy, Mt. Etna— Sicily is the home of the Goddess Demeter whose daughter Persephone has carried across the island by Pluto. It was for a Syracusean ruler that Plato tried to put his model republic into practice. And many another Greek name familiar enough by sight but utterly beyond my powers of spelling I find associated with this wonderful island.

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Well this is enough for once. We have been out all day, 5 and are ready for bed. Rome has blocks after blocks, street after street of new buildings, all very uninteresting and looking very shoddy. Many blocks of half built houses are standing abandoned, mementoes of some building boom arrested half-way. The new embankments are fine and high, I can't find where they gave way last winter so that half Rome was under water. But the Fountain of Trevi and St. Peters look just the same. I meant to go to Hotel Bristol where we were last time, but was advised that the manager was not altogether reliable, and so came here. It is a new house on the Quirinal hill, and so high up.

I hope I will hear from you soon, I have had no letter for a very long time and I want to know all about you and your father.

Ever yours, (Mabel.) unsigned.